



Systemic Issues from Previous Annual Reports

DISPROPORTIONATE NUMBER OF ABORIGINAL CHILDREN IN CARE

The 2010-11 Annual Report describes the challenges and needs of Aboriginal young people involved with Ministry services as complex and difficult to resolve. While discussions have been ongoing between the Ministry and Aboriginal stakeholders, the disproportionate number of Aboriginal children in care continued to increase. There is an urgent need to take action on the following recommendations:

- 1 *Building on work to date, partner with Aboriginal stakeholders to safely reduce the number of Aboriginal young people coming into Ministry care.*
- 2 *Reduce the amount of time in care for Aboriginal young people.*
- 3 *Strengthen commitment to Aboriginal young people's ongoing connection and involvement with their families, communities and Nations and support their participation in culture and tradition.*

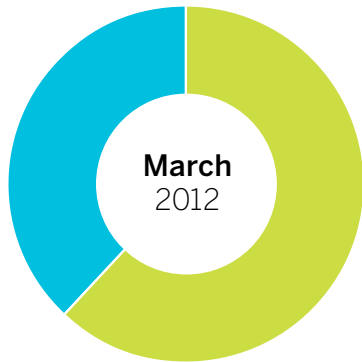
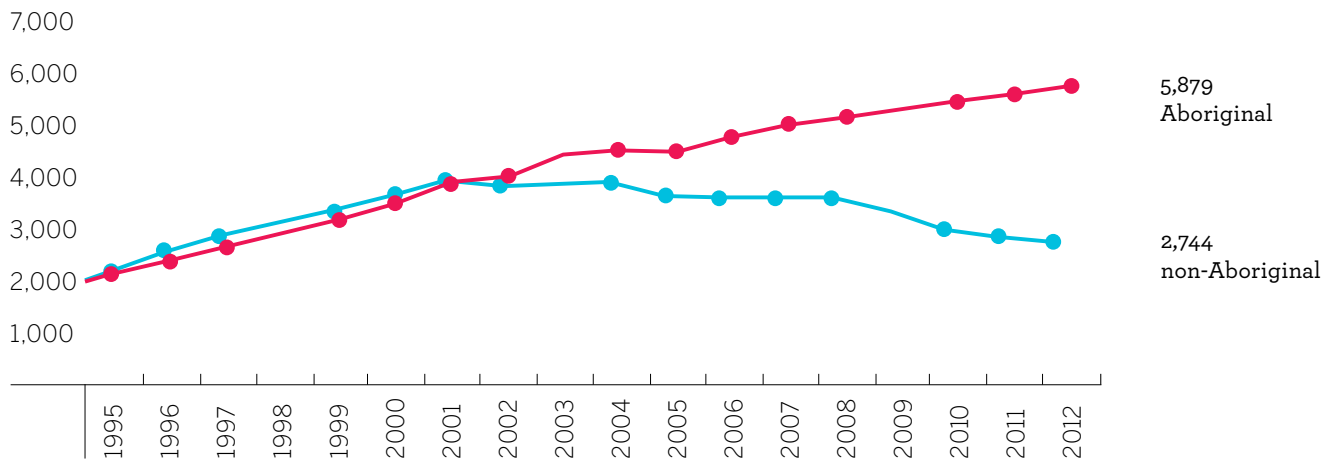
The disproportionate number of Aboriginal young people in government care increased again in 2011. Consistent with previous years, this is a result of both an increase in the actual number of Aboriginal young people in care, and a corresponding decrease in the actual number of non-Aboriginal children in care. The following graphs reflect the continuing disparity.

Although Aboriginal children and youth make up only nine per cent of the young people in Alberta aged 0-17 years (according to 2006 Census figures), they make up a much greater proportion of the children and youth receiving all types of child intervention services. The over-representation of Aboriginal young people increases with the severity of the intervention.

Over the last couple of years, this disparity has widened slightly. From 2009-10 to 2011-12, the percentage of children receiving services while Not in Care who were Aboriginal decreased two per cent, while the percentage in permanent care who were Aboriginal increased two per cent.

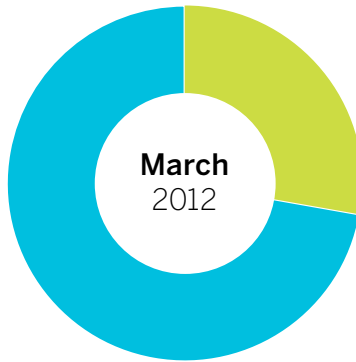
The Ministry's efforts regarding recruitment of Aboriginal caregivers and the Ministry's response to the 2010 Child Intervention Review Panel were reviewed in last year's report.

Number of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Children in Ministry Care in Alberta (March of each year)*



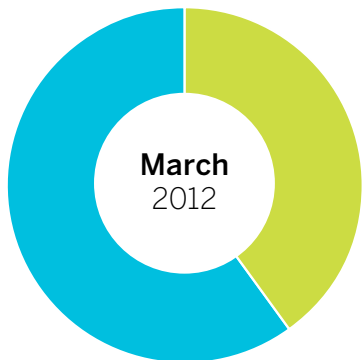
Receiving Services but Not in Care*

non-Aboriginal	2,255 (62%)
Aboriginal	1,383 (38%)



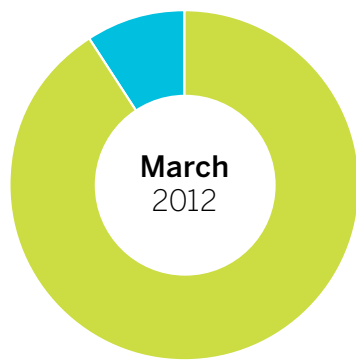
Permanent Care*

non-Aboriginal	1,641 (28%)
Aboriginal	4,177 (72%)



Temporary Care*

non-Aboriginal	1,150 (40%)
Aboriginal	1,702 (60%)



General Child Population**

non-Aboriginal	807,147 (91%)
Aboriginal	79,828 (9%)



* Statistics for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children in care was extracted from the Child Youth Information Module and the Intervention Services Information System.

** Estimates based on population figures derived from Alberta Health and Wellness' Interactive Health Data Application (2012) and Statistics Canada's 2006 Census.

There has been limited but steady progress in the percentage of Aboriginal young people in foster or kinship care who are placed with Aboriginal families or caregivers. In 2007, the percentage was 38.5 per cent and by 2011, it was 42.7 per cent.

An Assistant Deputy Minister for Aboriginal Policy and Initiatives Division was recruited and has focused on addressing issues related to Aboriginal young people in care. This division has been engaged in a series of community conversations and is working on developing a framework for change.

Work is underway on a Memorandum of Understanding with First Nations leaders and the federal government, based on a shared understanding and vision, that will support a new approach to serving Aboriginal children and families.

Unfortunately, while these initiatives were underway, the disproportionate number of Aboriginal children in government care continued to grow. This year is no different. In 2011, the number of Aboriginal children in government care again increased.

MINISTRY OF HUMAN SERVICES STATUS

The Aboriginal Policy and Initiatives Division was established in June 2011 and the Assistant Deputy Minister post was filled in early September of 2011. The Ministry is working collaboratively to develop a Memorandum of Understanding with First Nations leaders and the federal government, based on a shared understanding and vision, which will support a new approach to serving Aboriginal children and families. The Ministry continues to actively recruit Aboriginal caseworkers as well as Aboriginal foster parents and kinship care providers. The Ministry is also working to clarify and strengthen the role of the First Nations Designate in providing services to First Nations families.

- The proportion of Aboriginal children in care increased from 66 per cent in March 2011 (5,274 children) to 68 per cent in March 2012 (5,879 children, an increase of 155 children). This increase is affected by:
 - A decrease (three per cent or 214 children) in the number of non-Aboriginal children in permanent care from March 2011 to March 2012.
 - An increase in the number of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children in temporary care.
- The Ministry committed significant effort to develop strategies for proactively recruiting Aboriginal staff and promoting Human Services as an employer of choice so that more children in care have access to culturally congruent services, which will be implemented in the upcoming year.
 - The strategy utilizes reputable ambassadors who are current Aboriginal staff members, and informs Aboriginal stakeholders of the type of work available in the field.
 - The development of a set of informational tools was initiated. A steering committee was established and the materials will include a booklet with personal stories and an associated website, and will highlight Aboriginal staff.
- Collaborative work between Treaty areas and CFSAAs within the Treaty areas was initiated regarding the definition and responsibilities of the role of the First Nations designate, with Chief and Councils, CFSA staff and DFNA staff and representatives from non-delegated First Nations.
- In order to provide services that reflect and respect Aboriginal history and culture, the Ministry is committed to enhancing staff cultural competency and understanding of the challenges facing Aboriginal families and communities.
- Significant work was done to implement collaborative projects with community agencies and numerous community engagement opportunities were initiated.

- Examples of these initiatives include:
 - The development of the “Leveling the Playing Field” initiative, which is a partnership between the Creating Hope Society, the Multi-Cultural Health Brokers and the Ministry to support Aboriginal and immigrant women who become involved with the child intervention system.
 - Significant work went into preparing for the April 1, 2012 launch of the first Aboriginal Outcomes-Based Service Delivery pilot site, a partnership between the Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society, the Boyle Street Co-Op and the Edmonton and Area CFSA.
 - Aboriginal Policy and Community Engagement (APCE) Division began participation in “The Braid Project” initiative, which is a project to collectively and collaboratively understand the trend of Aboriginal over- and under-representation in the child intervention system.
 - APCE partnered with Aboriginal Colleges, other scholars, other governments and organizations in a “Social Reconciliation Project”. The partners are working collaboratively on ways to build the systemic conditions key to sustainable, self-directed economic development.

ADVOCATE’S RECOMMENDATION FROM 2010

- The Ministry take action, developed in partnership with Aboriginal stakeholders, that builds on work to date, and specifically addresses safety, reducing the number of Aboriginal young people coming into Ministry care, and for those who do, reducing the amount of time in care that builds on the work to date, and starts reversing an upward trend for Aboriginal young people in Ministry care.
- As well, for those Aboriginal young people who are in care, this action needs to include an increased commitment to their ongoing connection and involvement with their families, communities, and Nations and support for participation in their cultures and traditions.

PROGRESS IDENTIFIED BY CHILD AND YOUTH ADVOCATE

To date there has still been no concrete action plan developed and implemented in partnership with Aboriginal stakeholders, to address the disproportionate number of Aboriginal children in government care. There is no priority more urgent and pressing for children in care of the Ministry of Human Services. The disproportionate number of Aboriginal young people in Government care has to be addressed with clear commitment and concrete action. This is the only way that Aboriginal young people will have a different experience with child intervention services in the future than they have had in the past.

On numerous occasions, it is apparent where there is a lack of knowledge and understanding in regards to Aboriginal culture and traditions. In dealing with Aboriginal children and youth, an awareness of their cultural values and traditions needs to be recognized and applied in the work that takes place. In our current circumstances where there are a high number of children and youth in care who are Aboriginal, I am grateful that one of our own, Del Graff, is the new Children’s Advocate.

DR. EVA CARDINAL